

SHORT HISTORY OF MY MOTHER

By Abby K. Gooch

Mary Jane Little was the daughter of Patriarch James A. Little and Anna Matilda Baldwin.

Her father was born in the state of New York and her mother in Birmingham, England. At the age of 16 years her mother embraced the Gospel. She walked and pushed her handcart across the plains with the 1st Handcart Company.

Mother was born the 31st of December 1859 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her mother was a plural wife, and many times I have heard my grandmother and mother tell of the hardships and heartaches they endured along with many others. When we ask why they endured those things we were always told for the Gospels sake. She was the eldest of 9 children. I cannot give much about my mothers childhood nor her schooling, I only know she never had much schooling but with her keen mind and determination she had educated herself so that to talk to her one would never know she had been deprived of it.

She said she could never remember of sleeping warm as a child, for lack of bedding and sufficient fuel and often never had all she wanted to eat; but not through neglect of her mother, for she was very ambitious and very thrifty.

Her mother was compelled to work for a living as most plural wives were. When mother was two years old they pioneered to St. George, Utah. It was while here, when mother was 10 years old, that her mother's fourth child was born and mother was taken out of school to care for the little family until grandmother was able to do it. She did the washing, ironing, mending, cooking, and baked the bread for the family. Her pleasures were few, most of her spare time being spent threading the shuttles for the loom while her mother weaved. They spun their own cloth for all their clothes as well as everything else.

When 11 years old they moved to Eagle Valley, Nevada, where they lived for just about a year. The hardships they went through there were terrible, so her mother took her little family and moved to Payson, Utah to live with her mother, who was a widow. She said that the next year was one of the happiest years of her childhood days. Her grandmother was a midwife and very ambitious and to them she seemed to have plenty. For once she slept warm and had a few things to eat they were not used to. Her mother of course, still had to work but not so hard. The things mother learned while there she never forgot. For once she had access to good books. She loved to read and good books were hard to get. Her mother had taught her not to read trashy books.

Her grandmother was a brilliant woman and had had a wealth of experience, she wasn't home much being a midwife called out, of course, day or night.

Mother said many a morning when she got up she would open her grandmother's door to see if she was home, and found her kneeling by the side of her bed in prayer. These things were impressed on her young mind and she never forgot them.

A year later they moved to Kanab, Kane Co. Utah. Mother had a beautiful voice, and when about 13 years old a Mr. Thompson, a music teacher from Salt Lake City heard her sing and offered to put mother through music if they would let her go. But of course, they wouldn't let her go. What true mother would at that tender age?

When mother was about 15 years old she met my father, Elmer Wood Johnson. I asked my father once how he came to notice a little 15 year old girl. He smiled and said, "Her innocent sweet face, sweet voice and pretty curls attracted him."

In those days girls dresses were lengthened by degrees rather than age, and some of the good people were shocked to think she was going to be married and had never worn a long dress.

The details of their marriage and other eventful things of their lives are in father's history so I will only mention some of her personal outstanding characteristics to me.

When their first baby was born she cut out and sewed all the little clothes by hand and by herself, and had nothing but straight pins to use fo the baby. Naturally it was a trial for her when father took another wife, but mother was the kind who would endure anything taught by the authorities.

On their trip to Mexico in 1887, she knitted socks for father, and stockings for herself and the children, and made by hand the little clothes for her expected wee one. I can never forget one thing she told us, She told us that in spite of its hardships it was the happiest two months she had spent in years, because she had father all by herself. I'm sure none of us would blame her for feeling that way.

When they got to Mexico most of the women still had to help make the living, I'd like to mention some of the things she did to help feed and clothe her family. Mother was very ambitious, she was a good sewer and a godd house-keeper.

Mother learned through her efforts, enough about music (she loved it very much) to teach a class of young people. No piano's or organs were around then but with a tunign fork she would get her pitch. She must have read mucic well also the time or whe couldn't have done it. She went out dress-making a lot taking one of the older girls to care for her baby. She also made different kinds of cookies and also bluing to sell. Another thing she did, she made a live yeast and supplied that little town with yeast all her life while in Mexico. They would bring the amount of flour they wanted of yeast, in that way she supplied her's and Aunt Julia's family with flour for yeats.

I shall never forget the large crock mother kept the yeast in and how I hated to take my turn at grating the potatoes in the morning for the yeast. It wasn't hard work, but like all girls I guess I didn't like to work.

It was mother who realized more money would be needed as we grew older so she and the older girls decided to make candy and sell it. They started it in a small kitchen with a mud roof and mud floor, and had to cool it in bread pans in tubs of water. With a lot of hard work and perserverance they succeeded.

In my mothers very busy and strenuous life, such as all pioneers went through, she was never too busy to teach her children the beautiful things of life. Seems in the plural families in those days, the mothers were left with a lot of training of the children. We were taught the value of prayer, to sing, and to be kind and lenient with others. Never to speak ill of anyone. To acknowledge Gods will in everything. We were taught to attend our Sacrement meetings and be prompt and dependable in performing our church duties. That the only right way to be married was to be married in the temple. In fact all the principles of the Gospel were taught and lived to the best of our ability in our home. I remember I learned young to keep the Word of Wisdom and pay tithing. Many a time we children helped to count sack after sack of corn, so we would be sure to pay a full tithing on it, the same with all fruits and vegetables. The Relief Society once has a project to do, and ask the women to give their Sunday eggs to them. We youngsters always liked to gather them on Sunday for it amused us to find nearly always there would be more on that day. The value of such teachings can never be over estimated.

The sabbath day was always a day of worship not one to do odd jobs on. Meals were cooked the day before and were served in a simple way on Sunday. Our little shoes were always polished saturday night after we had gone to

bed, with nothing but the soot from the stove to serve as polish. Wearing apparel, such as it was, was clean and buttons all sewed on ready to put on. Busy as mother was I can never remember putting on a pair of underclothes without either lace or tatting on, and made by mothers busy and tired hands. One thing I can never forget, she always told us it was better to wear a soiled dress than soiled underwear. We wore more then than they wear today. One thing I have always been thankful for, she would never allow us to speak disrespectful of Aunt Julia, regardless of conflict which was bound to arise which to me is wonderful. Mothers work deprived her of attending Relief Society but she always gave her monthly donation to the teachers and took the magazine. She loved to sing and she joined the choir at the age of 12 and sang in it until they were driven out of Mexico in 1912, after that she was never permanent long enough in a ward to join the choir, but she still loved to sing. Their exodus from Mexico, the heartaches and tears, the tragedies of them and their children I have written in fathers history.

Mothers health was never good after my brothers deaths. Mother was a nice looking woman, very cultured, a lady indeed. She never used slang in any way and taught us it was not lady like to do it. She was a very nervous woman and who wouldn't be after going through what she did.

On the 12th of Janauary 1932, after 2 or 3 weeks confinement in bed, she passed quietly away, leaving with her children and her 35 grandchildren a burning testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel and the memory of a life well spent. Surely we her children should cherish such a heritage. At the present time, she has over one hundred and ten living decendants, as far as I know. She was a wonderful mother and I thank her for the wonderful life she lived and the teachings she instilled in my heart when young. God bless her memory.